R. Jackson (W)

THIRTY LETTERS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

ADVERTISEMENT,

Prefixed to the First Edition.

WHETHER theſe are real letters, or whether the author choſe to throw his obſervations into the epiſtolary form is a point of no great conſequence. The invention of a ſtory to ſhew how they came into the editor's hands is by no means difficult. — A parcel of papers reſcued from the trunk-maker or paſtry-cook, has ſaved many

many an author from periſhing. CERVANTES and STERNE were not above ſuch ſhifts; but they have ſerved ſo often, that now, even the truth, tho' without the leaſt mixture of the marvellous, paſſes for invention.

Should theſe little volumes contain any new and uſeful obſervations on men and things, it is a ſufficient reaſon for their publication—if the phyſic be wholeſome, it is no matter under what form it is adminiſtered.

LETTERS.

LETTERS.

LETTER I.

SINCE you requeſt that our correſpondence ſhould be out of the beaten track, be it ſo. My retirement from the world will naturally give an air of peculiarity to my ſentiments, which perhaps may entertain where it does not convince. In juſtice to myſelf, let me

obſerve, that truth ſometimes does not ſtrike us without the aſſiſtance of cuſtom; but ſo great is the force of cuſtom, that, unaſſiſted by truth, it has worked the greateſt miracles. Need I bring for proof the quantity of nonſenſe in all the arts, ſciences, and even religion itſelf, which it has ſanctified? As poſſibly in the courſe of my letters to you I may attack ſome received doctrines on each of theſe ſubjects, let not what I advance be inſtantly rejected, becauſe contrary to an opinion founded on prejudice; but, as much as poſſible, diveſt yourſelf of the partiality acquired by habit, and if at laſt you ſhould not agree with me, I ſhall ſuſpect my ſentiments to be peculiar and not juſt.

Tho'

Tho' truth may want the aſſiſtance of uſe before we feel its force, yet when it is really felt, we deteſt what cuſtom only made us like. The difficulty is to procure for truth a fair examination. The multitude is always againſt it. The firſt diſcovery in any thing is conſidered as an encroachment upon property, a property become ſacred by poſſeſſion. Diſcoverers are accordingly treated as criminals, and muſt have good luck to eſcape execution.

I mean not to rank myſelf with ſuch bold adventurers; I am neither ambitious of the honour, or the danger, of enlightening the world, but if I can ſoften prejudices which I cannot remove—if I can looſen the

of cuſtom where I cannot altogether unbind them, and engage you to think for yourſelf—my end will be anſwered, and my trouble fully repaid.

Adieu! &c.

LETTER II.

* * * * * *

IT is natural to ſuppoſe, that people originally judged of things by their ſenſes and immediate perceptions. By degrees they found that their ſenſes were not infallible, and that things frequently contradicted their firſt appearance. This, at laſt, was puſhed to an extravagance; and certain philoſophers endeavoured to perſuade mankind, that the ſenſes deceive us ſo often, that we can never depend on them—that we cannot tell whether we are in motion or at reſt, aſleep or awake,

with many other ſuch abſurdities. They uſed the ſame ingenuity with the mental ſenſe. Some ancient ſage was aſked, "Who is the richeſt man? If he had replied, "He that has moſt money," the anſwer would have been natural and juſt—what he did ſay, every one knows. We have ſuffered ourſelves to be impoſed on ſo long, that at laſt we begin to impoſe on ourſelves.

Riches, cards, and duelling, have furniſhed conſtant topics for abuſe, to divines, and moraliſts; and yet men will ſtill hoard, play, and fight. Why ſhould they? All univerſal paſſions we may fairly pronounce to be natural, and ſhould be treated with reſpect. The gratification of our paſſions are our greateſt pleaſures,

ſures, and he that has moſt gratifications is of courſe the happieſt man. This, as a general aſſertion, is true, and it is true alſo in particulars; provided we pay no more for pleaſure than it is worth.

Every man ſhould endeavour to be rich. He that has money may poſſeſs every thing that is transferable—this is a ſufficient inducement to procure it. Nay, if he poſſeſſes nothing but his money, if he conſiders it as the end, as well as the means, it is ſtill right to be rich: for, knowing that he has it in his power to procure every thing, he is as well ſatisfied as if the thing itſelf was in his poſſeſſion. This is the true ſource of the miſer's pleaſure; and a great pleaſure it is! A moral

philoſopher may tell him, "that man does not live for himſelf alone, and that he hurts the community by withholding what would be of uſe to it"— this he thinks to be weak reaſoning. The ſneers of wits ſignify as little; for he knows they would be glad to be rich if they could. He feels that the pleaſure ariſing from the poſſeſſion of riches, whether uſed or not, is too great to be given up for all the wit, or even the ſtrongeſt arguments that can be brought againſt it.

It ſeems to be agreed, that card-playing proceeds entirely from avarice—tho' this may ſometimes be the motive, yet it may with more probability be derived from other, and more general principles.

The

The mind of man naturally requires employment, and that employment is moſt agreeable, which engages, without fatiguing the attention. There is nothing for this purpoſe of ſuch univerſal attraction as cards. The fine arts and belles lettres can only be enjoyed by thoſe who have a genius for them—other ſtudies and amuſements have their particular charm, but cards are the univerſal amuſement in every country where they are known. The alternate changes in the play, the hope upon the taking up a new hand, and the triumph of getting a game, made more compleat from the fear of loſing it, keep the mind in a perpetual agitation, which is found by experience to be too agreeable to be quitted

quitted for any other conſideration. The ſtake played for is a quickener of theſe ſenſations, but not the cauſe. Children who play for nothing, feel what I have been deſcribing, perhaps, in a more exquiſite degree, than thoſe who game for thouſands. A ſtate of inaction is of all others the moſt dreadful! and it is to avoid this inaction that we ſeek employment, though at the expence of health, temper, and fortune.

This ſubject is finely touched by Abbé du Bos, in his reflexions upon poetry, &c. indeed he carries it ſo far as to ſay, that the pleaſure ariſing from an extraordinary agitation of the mind, is frequently ſo great as to ſtifle humanity; and from hence ariſes the entertainment of the com-

mon

mon people at executions, and of the better ſort at tragedies. Tho' in this laſt inſtance he may be miſtaken; yet, the delight we feel in reading the actions of a hero may be referred to this cauſe. The moraliſt cenſures the taſte of thoſe who can be pleaſed with the actions of an Alexander or a Nadir Shah—the Truth is, we do not approve the actions; but the relation of them cauſes that agitation of the mind which we find to be ſo pleaſant. The reign of Henry the ſeventh, tho' of the greateſt conſequence to this nation, does not intereſt us like the contentions of York and Lancaſter by which the kingdom was ruined. —It is in vain that we are told that ſcenes of war and bloodſhed can

give

give no pleaſure to a good mind, and that the true hero is he who cultivates the arts of peace, he by whom men are benefited, not he by whom they are deſtroyed—it is to no purpoſe—we ſleep over the actions of quiet goodneſs; while aſpiring, deſtroying greatneſs, claims and commands our attention.

Duelling has in many countries a law againſt it—but can never be prevented. The law can inflict no greater penalty for any breach of it than death; which the duelliſt contemns.—There are alſo ſome caſes of injury which laws cannot prevent, nor puniſh when committed—theſe muſt be redreſſed by the man who ſuffers, and by him *only*. He is prompted to do this by ſomething

thing antecedent, and ſuperior to all law, and by a deſire as eager as hunger or luſt; ſo that it is as eaſy for laws to prevent or reſtrain the two latter, as the former. Very luckily for us, occaſions for the gratifications of this paſſion occur but ſeldom: and tho' a man may be reſtrained from a duel by perſonal fear, which is its only counteractor, there are very few inſtances, perhaps none, of its being prevented by conſidering it as a breach of the law.

In the beginning of the laſt century duels were ſo frequent, particularly in France, as to occaſion a ſevere edict to prevent them —indeed by their frequency, they were by degrees improved into combats

bats of two, three, and ſometimes more of a ſide.—In thoſe days a French nobleman was making up his party to decide a quarrel with another perſon of equal rank; it came to the King's ears, who ſent to him one of the moſt riſing men at court with a command to deſiſt, aſſuring him of the ſtrict execution of the edict in caſe of diſobedience.—Every one knows the attachment of the French to their ſovereign, but yet it proved weak when ſet againſt this all-powerful paſſion. The nobleman not only refuſed to obey the king, but actually engaged the meſſenger to be one of his party.

The above ſeem to be the principal reaſons why riches, cards, and duelling

duelling have ſo deep a root in the mind of man—but there are others which come in aid. The deſire of ſuperiority is of itſelf almoſt ſufficient to produce this great effect.

Believe me ever yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

I Cannot comply with your desire —a regular dissertation is above me——but if you will take my thoughts as they occur, the honour of methodizing them shall be yours.

Languages are termed rough and smooth, weak or expressive, frequently without reason.—As these are comparative terms, they change their application according to circumstances. The French is said to be a smooth or rough language, when compared with the German

or

or Italian. Perhaps this is true, and yet we ſhould not determine too haſtily. In appearance, there are more vowels in the Italian language than in the French; but in pronunciation the French loſe many Conſonants, and the Italians none: and yet in French, ſo great is the irregularity of that language, many conſonants are pronounced which are not written——ſmoothneſs or roughneſs muſt therefore depend on the ear alone; yet how far a language is weak or expreſſive, may be treated of and determined with preciſion.

Every ſentence may be conſidered as the picture of an idea; the quicker that picture is preſented to the mind, the ſtronger is its

Impreſſion. That language then which is ſhorteſt, is the moſt expreſſive. If we ſhould fix on any language as being in general the moſt conciſe, yet, if in ſome inſtances it is more diffuſe than another, then, in thoſe inſtances the latter is moſt expreſſive. This, I believe, is an univerſal rule, and without exception.

Let us for the preſent ſuppoſe Latin to be more expreſſive, becauſe ſhorter, than any modern language, and compare it with Engliſh in ſome examples, juſt as they occur. *Captus oculis* and *cæcus*—are uſed for the ſame thing—the laſt is more expreſſive than the firſt, and both leſs ſo than *blind:* a ſingle ſyllable does the office of many. How much more

more forcibly does it ſtrike us to be told that our friend is dead, than *mortuus eſt*, or *Mors continuo ipſum occupavit?* This laſt is indeed poetical, if we ſuppoſe death a perſon.

Though I juſt now ſaid that Latin was cloſer in its expreſſion than any modern language, it was only in compliance with common opinion; for I have great reaſon to believe that it yields in this reſpect to Engliſh: The latin hexameter and Terence's line being with eaſe included in our heroic verſe, which is not ſo long by many ſyllables. There have been various pieces of Engliſh poetry tranſlated into Latin, and, in general nothing can read more dead and unanimated. In the eighth

volume of the Spectator is a tranſlation of the famous ſoliloquy in the Play of Cato—compare it with the original, and obſerve how the ſame thought is ſtrong in Engliſh and weak in Latin, occaſioned entirely by its being cloſe in one language, and diffuſe in the other: for, as much as one ſentence exceeds another in length, in the ſame proportion does it fail in expreſſion.

Tranſlations, moſt commonly, are more verboſe than their original, which is one reaſon for their weakneſs; whenever they are leſs ſo, they are ſtronger. Suppoſe we ſhould find in a French author theſe phraſes, *Un Canon de neuf livres de Balle—Un Vaiſſeau du Roi du quatre vingt dix Pieces du Canon*; and they were rendered into Engliſh

liſh by a *nine-pounder—A ninety-gun ſhip*—is not the tranſlation more ſpirited than the original? I purpoſely choſe a phraſe with as little matter in it as poſſible, where the meaning could not be miſtaken, and in which there was no variety of expreſſion, that the trial might be fairer.

I have heard that the German is an expreſſive language——I do not underſtand it; but I can perceive that, for the moſt part, the words are very long, which makes againſt its being ſo. French, and Italian particularly, are much more diffuſe than Engliſh. Tranſlations from theſe languages have often a force that the originals wanted; and this not owing to the Engliſh being a ſtronger language in *ſound*, as ſome

have ſuppoſed, but to ſtrength occaſioned by brevity.

Perhaps it may be imagined, that thoſe words which carry their ſignification with them ſhould be moſt expreſſive, whether long or ſhort; that is, when they are derived from, or compounded of known words, which expreſs that ſignification. But this is not ſo. When we ſay *adieu*, *farewell*—we mean no more than a ceremony at parting.—No one conſiders *adieu* as a recommendation to God, or *farewell* as a wiſh for happineſs. —Frequent uſe deſtroys all idea of derivation. But if we ſpeak a compound or ſelf-ſignificative word that is not common, we perceive the derivation of it. Thus if a Londoner ſays *butter-milk*, he has an

an idea of ſomething compounded of *butter* and *milk*; but to an Iriſhman or Hollander, it is as ſimple an idea as either of the words taken ſeparately, is to us.

It is but of late that our orthography was fixed, even in the moſt common words. Two hundred years ago, every perſon ſpelt as he liked: a privilege enjoyed ſtill later than that period by "royal and noble authors," who ſeem, in this inſtance, to claim the liberty enjoyed by their anceſtors. Since the time orthography has been thought of ſome conſequence, we have attended partly to pronunciation, tho' chiefly to derivation. But, in ſome caſes, where we ſhould altogether have ſpelt according to derivation,

derivation, we have taken pronunciation for our guide. And this has occaſioned ſome confuſion; for inſtance *naught* is *bad*—*nought* is *nothing*; theſe terms were long confounded, and even now are not kept perfectly diſtinct, which has occaſioned *ought* to be written *aught*. *Wrapt* is envelloped—*rapt* is hurried away, or totally poſſeſſed: the firſt of theſe is frequently uſed for the laſt, by ſome of our modern poets. *Marry* is an aſſeveration—*marry*, to give in marriage—the ſpelling theſe words the ſame, confounds them together; we ſhould have preſerved for the firſt, the real word *mary*. It was a common thing formerly to ſwear by *Mary*, the *a* in which was pronounced

nounced broad, as the Prieſts of that time did the Latin *Maria*, from whom the common people took the pronunciation. In one of the pieces in the firſt volume of the collection of old plays, it frequently occurs, and is ſpelt as a proper name, *Marie*. Permit me to obſerve, that the editor, by modernizing the ſpelling in the other volumes, has prevented their being made this uſe of, as they might have ſhewed the progreſs of orthography as well as of dramatic poetry.

In the reign of James the firſt were many attempts to reduce orthography altogether to pronunciation. In our time we have ſeen ſome attempts to bring it altogether from derivation—but ſurely both

both were wrong. Whoever reads Howel's letters, or Dr. Newton's Milton, will ſee, that by a partial principle too generally adopted, they have made of the Engliſh language "a very fantaſtical banquet —juſt ſo many ſtrange diſhes!"

There are many inverſions of phraſes uſed in poetry which are contrary to the genius of our language. In the tranſlation of the Iliad there frequently occurs "thunders the ſky"——"totters the ground," meaning that "the ſky thunders" and "the ground totters." This change of poſition has the authority of ſome of our beſt poets, tho' it frequently obſcures the ſenſe, and ſometimes makes it directly contrary to what

is

is intended to be expreſſed. Our language does not, with eaſe, admit of the nominative after the verb. If we read, tho' in poetry, "ſhakes the ground" we do not readily underſtand that "the ground ſhakes," but rather refer to ſome antecedent nominative that has produced this effect. To adopt the conſtruction of the ancient languages is as awkward as to adopt their meaſures. You will underſtand this to be meant as a general obſervation, the truth of which is not deſtroyed by a few exceptions where the inverſion may be happily uſed. The ſenſe in theſe verſes of Pope "halts" as much by Roman conſtruction, as the Rhythmus in Sidney does by "Roman feet."

In

In reading Latin and Greek we are obliged to keep the ſenſe ſuſpended until we come to the end of the period, but it is not ſo in any modern language that I know of, except now and then in Italian poetry; ſo that there is a ſameneſs of conſtruction in all of them when compared with the ancient languages. Now, this ſuſpenſion of the ſenſe is ſurely no advantage, therefore if it were poſſible to make Engliſh like Latin and Greek in this reſpect, it would hurt the language.

In another letter I may poſſibly reſume this ſubject.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

OUR greateſt miſtake in the purſuit of happineſs as well as of ſcience, is to judge by the perceptions of others, and not by our own. This perverſion is admirably ridiculed in ſome comedy, in which a young fellow naturally ſober, gives into debaucheries merely becauſe they are faſhionable. "I am horrid ſick"—ſays he—"I am tired to death — I hate cards — but it is *life* for all that!"

My friend, examine your heart— You yourſelf are the beſt judge of what

what contributes to your own happineſs. Is the pleaſure of ſhooting equal to the fatigue? . . . Put down the gun. Is the cry of the hounds a ſufficient charm to remove the fear of breaking your neck? . . . Come off your horſe. —And in pure charity let me adviſe the "*im*patient fiſher" to convert his rod into a walking ſtick, jemmy, and ſwitch. "For what? Do not gentlemen love country diverſions?" But if *you* do not, why ſhould you be governed by *their* inclinations?

Mr. Connoiſſeur, do not pertend raptures at muſic, you know you have no ear.—Stare not at that picture, you are ſenſible you have no eye.—Cloſe that book, let others

weep;

weep; you have no heart. "Sir, it is the taſte to admire muſic, painting, and fine writing."—I am very glad of it.—But it is not *your* taſte, here

——— hinc Vos,
Vos hinc, mutatis diſcedite partibus—

Now confeſs honeſtly Mr. Sportſman, that you have more pleaſure in Snyder's pictures, than from hunting in propriâ perſonâ—that the French horns at a concert have more harmony than in a wood. And, Mr. Connoiſſeur, you are now in your element.— Is it not better to "join the jovial chace" than the inſipid crew of the dilettanti?

Let us remember and practice the old maxim.

——trahit *ſua* quemque Voluptas.

LETTER

LETTER V.

Dear Sir,

I Am glad you go on with your painting. Though you ſhould never arrive at any great degree of excellence yourſelf, it will infallibly make you a better judge of the excellencies of others. You tell me, what indeed every Connoiſſeur ſays by rote, that the great painters painted above, beyond nature! That they painted beyond nature I grant, but not above, if by above we are to underſtand ſomething more

more excellent than what we find in nature. I have long been ſick of the cant of writers and talkers upon this ſubject. If it be poſſible, let us ſpeak a little common-ſenſe —endeavour to ſhew what ſeems by our feelings to be the truth, and then prevent a wrong application of it.

The great painters, it is agreed, painted beyond nature—but how? Why, if I may venture to ſay it, by drawing and colouring extravagantly. But were they right or wrong in doing ſo? This depends upon circumſtances. I remember ſeeing at a Painter's a head taken from nature, another copied from Hans Holbein, and a third from Giulio Romano—upon which

the artiſt made a diſſertation.—He firſt produced the portrait from nature, and aſked me how I liked it? I told him that there appeared to me great ſimplicity and elegance in it, and an excellence which I thought eſſential to a good picture —a proper balance between the light and ſhade of every part. (I meant that the ſhade of the white was lighter than that of blue—of blue fainter than of black, &c. ſo that each colour was as perceivable in the ſhadows as lights.) Ay, ſays he, that is true, but I will ſhew you a ſtyle preferable to it—Upon which he produced the copy from Holbein.—I agreed, that it was ſtronger, and ſuch as nature might appear in many inſtances.——But here,

here, ſays he, is ſomething *beyond* nature; this I call the ſublime ſtyle of painting, and this I will try to bring my heads to.—Then he diſcovered the copy from Giulio—there is ſtrength, ſays he—ſee how faint the others are.—Now, acknowledge that the picture I painted from nature is nothing to it. It muſt be confeſſed, I replied, that the extravagance of the laſt picture does for a moment dazzle our eyes—yours ſeems weak by the compariſon, it is like looking upon white paper after ſtaring at the ſun.—On the contrary, if I paſs from yours to this, I am hurt at ſeeing every thing ſo extravagant, and ſo far *beyond the modeſty of nature!*——"It is not intended to be ſtrictly

natural, it is the *fine ideal*, it is ſomething above, beyond nature!"

I muſt own that I have no idea of any beauty beyond what may be found in nature—indeed, whence is the idea to be taken? But do not think I rate Giulio or any of the ſublime painters lightly; I am ſo ſenſible of their merit, that, contrary perhaps to your expectation, I am about to defend their practice. They generally painted for churches, where the picture is ſeen in a bad light, or at a diſtance; ſo that it could not be ſeen at all if the manner was not violent: both the drawing and colouring muſt be extravagant to ſtrike—for which reaſon, they overcharged their attitudes, blackened their ſhadows,

reddened

reddened their carnations, and whitened their lights; and all this with the greateſt propriety. But if you apply this practice to cloſet or portrait painting, what is an excellence in them, becomes a defect in you. This picture which you have copied with ſo much ſucceſs, I dare ſay has an admirable effect where it hangs; but near the eye or in a ſtrong light, it is hard and over-done. On the other hand, if your portrait was to be hung at a great diſtance, or in an obſcure place, the delicate touches I now admire would eſcape the ſight. The ſtyle proper for the church is improper for the cloſet, and the contrary. The great painters were in the right then, in painting *beyond*

nature; but let us not imagine that ſuch figures and characters are therefore the moſt beautiful. No painter can invent a figure ſurpaſſing the *fineſt* of nature: for character and form, nature is the *juſt* and *only* ſtandard. He ſhews his genius more by properly aſſociating natural objects, and expreſſing natural characters, than by exaggerating them or by inventing new ones.

When I receive the picture you have promiſed me, I will criticiſe it with as much ſincerity as

I am your Friend, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VI.

YOU have turned my thoughts much towards painting of late —I have been trying to ſolve this queſtion.

What is the reaſon that thoſe objects which diſpleaſe us, or at beſt, that paſs unnoticed, in nature, pleaſe us moſt in painting?

A deep road, a puddle of water, a bank covered with docks and briars, and an old tree or two, are all the circumſtances in many a fine landſcape. As clowns and half ſtarved cattle are the figures a land-

ſcape-painter chuſes for his pictures; ſo rough-looking fellows wrapt up in ſheets and blankets, are choſen by the hiſtory-painter, to expreſs the greateſt perſonages, and in the moſt dignified actions of their lives.

Let the following obſervations have what weight they may—tho' they do not clearly anſwer, they ſeem to throw ſome light on this difficult queſtion.

1. While we are uncultivated, like the Iriſh Oſcar, if we are to be awakened, it muſt be by having a great ſtone thrown againſt our heads. The man of the utmoſt elegance and refinement may remember the time when, in reading, nothing moved him but the marvellous,

vellous; and in painting, nothing pleaſed him but the glaring. While he was in this ſtate, he delighted in books of chivalry and Chineſe pictures—theſe gave place to leſs extravagant repreſentations of life; and at laſt by much converſe with men of taſte, reading purer authors, and ſeeing better pictures, he is taught how to feel, and finds a perfect revolution even in his ſenſations. Thoſe objects which once delighted him, he now deſpiſes—theſe, on the contrary, he formerly took no notice of, he now ſees with rapture; and even goes ſo far as to admire the objects in nature, *he has learnt* to like in repreſentation.—Now, it is this improved, tho' artificial ſtate of the

the mind that conſtitutes the judge of painting—and it is the judge the painter is ſolicitous to pleaſe. —He is to attain this end then, by departing as much as poſſible from what is our natural barbarous taſte, and by conforming to that we have acquired.

2. It is moſt certain, that in all the arts we make difficulties in order to ſhew our ſkill in conquering them.—Some French writer calls this principle *la difficultè vaincue*; and this conqueſt is the ſource of much pleaſure. What is it but this, that induces the noveliſt and play-writer to embarraſs their characters with difficulties and troubles? What is there but this, that can make a muſical canon to be thought

thought fine in compoſition, or extravagant execution in performance agreeable, when the mind cannot comprehend the one, nor the ear follow the other? and, to bring it to the preſent ſubject—what is it but this, that induces the painter to make uſe of the moſt unpromiſing objects, and produce beauty where you might expect nothing but deformity?

3. It is neceſſary that a painter ſhould chuſe ſuch objects as are capable of variety either from ſhape or arrangement. Regular formal objects admit but little, eſpecially thoſe where art has the greateſt ſhare in their production, unleſs they are capable of motion, as ſhips, windmills, &c. and then they

they become pictoreſque by a proper choice of attitude. It is curious to obſerve the ſhifts to which artiſts are reduced, when they are obliged to paint ſuch objects as are in themſelves unpictoreſque—ſuppoſe a fine houſe with avenues of trees. They will vary the tint of the ſtones in the one, and of the leaves in the other, or by throwing in accidental ſhades and lights produce a variety. In like manner, portrait-painters undreſs the hair, looſen the coat, and wrinkle the ſtockings that they may produce a variety in the *manner* of *treating* a ſubject which wanted it in form.

Thoſe objects which have no ſet form have of courſe moſt variety.

A road, or river may wind in any direction—trees are of all ſizes and ſhapes, may ſtand here or there—looſe drapery admits a thouſand folds and diſpoſitions of which the ſtiff modern dreſs is incapable. So that the painter by taking theſe has ample materials for ſhewing his judgment in form, or ſkill in arrangement—for making, and overcoming difficulties—and laſtly, by the uniting both theſe he conforms to the principles by which the cultivated taſte is pleaſed—the ultimate end of all the fine arts.

If you are not ſatisfied with this ſolution, help me to a better—but give a fair reading to this of

Your ſincere friend, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

I Do not admit your excuſe.—A genius ſhould never comply with *local* or *temporary* taſte—inſtead of debaſing himſelf to the people, he ſhould elevate the people to him. When Milton ſubtilizes divinity, and Shakſpeare "cracks the wind of a poor phraſe;" who but wiſhes that thoſe great poets had not deſcended from their ſphere?

Your alluſions to incidents which muſt ſoon be forgot, are only worthy of a writer who expects but a ſhort exiſtence. It is true our plays

plays abound with ſuch alluſions. When Foigard, in the Beaux Stratagem, ſays he is a ſubject of the King of Spain—they aſk him in a fury, "which King of Spain?" This did very well at the time; but theſe two Kings of Spain are now of much leſs conſequence than their brother monarchs of Brentford. I think it is in the ſame play where one of the characters is aſked "when he was at church laſt?" he ſhould anſwer, "at the coronation;" but it is a point to give a reply that ſhall ſuit the time when the play is performed, forgetting that there are many expreſſions which remove you back into the laſt century when the play was written. I remember in the late

late King's reign, the reply uſed to be "at the inſtallation;" at the acceſſion of his preſent Majeſty an actor thought he had a good opportunity of returning to "coronation," but unluckily it was before the King was crowned.

Alluſions of this ſort ſoon become obſcure, and yet they will not bear being altered. "Pray you avoid them."

Adieu, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VIII.

TRUE, my friend, muſicians do commit ſtrange abſurdities by way of expreſſion—but fanciful people make them commit others which they never thought of.

The moſt common miſtake of compoſers is to expreſs words and not ideas. This is generally the caſe with Purcel, and frequently with Handel. I believe there is not a ſingle piece exiſting of the former, if it has a word to be played upon, but will prove my aſſertion: and the latter, if the

impetuoſity of the muſical ſubject will give him leave, will at any time quit it for a pun. There is no trap ſo likely to catch compoſers as the words *high* and *low*, *down* and *up*. "By G— (as Quin ſays) they muſt bite." In what raptures was Purcel when he ſet "They that *go down* to the ſea in ſhips." How lucky a circumſtance, that there was a ſinger at that time, who could *go down* to DD, and *go up* two Octaves above? for there is in other parts of the anthem a going *up* as well as *down*. The whole is a conſtellation of beauties of this kind. Handel had leiſure, at the concluſion of an excellent movement, to endeavour at an imitation of the rocking of a cradle

(See

(See the end of the anthem "My heart is inditing"), and has his *ups* and *downs* too in plenty. If many examples of this may be found in theſe great geniuſes, it would be endleſs to enumerate the inſtances in thoſe of the lower order. Let it ſuffice to obſerve, that all operas without exception, the greateſt part of church-muſic, and particularly Marcello's pſalms, abound in this ridiculous imitative expreſſion.

This is trifling with the words and neglecting the ſentiment; but the fault is much increaſed when a word is expreſſed in contradiction to the ſentiment. A moſt flagrant inſtance of this is in Boyce's Solomon, in the ſong of "Ariſe my

Fair-One come away."—The hero of the piece is inviting his miſtreſs to come to him, and to tempt her the more, in deſcribing the beauty of the ſpring, he tells her that

"Stern winter's *gone* with all its train
"Of chilling froſts and dropping rain."

but it is *come* in the muſic—the unlucky words of *winter*, *froſt*, and *rain*, made the compoſer ſet the lover a ſhivering, when he was full of the feelings of the "genial ray!"

But ſometimes expreſſion of the ſentiment is blameable, if ſuch expreſſion is improper for the general effect of the piece. Religious ſolemnity ſhould not appear at the theatre, nor theatrical levity at the church. In the *Stabat Mater* of

of Pergoleſi, and in the *Meſſiah* of Handel, there is an expreſſion of whipping attempted, which, if it is underſtood at all, conveys either a ludicrous or prophane idea, according to the diſpoſition of the hearer. Permit me to ſuſpend my remarks a moment, juſt to obſerve, that there is ſometimes mention made in plays, of providence, God, and other ſubjects, which are as incompatible with a place of public entertainment, as the common ſentiments of plays are with the church. If we are diſguſted at a theatrical preacher, we are not leſs offended when an actor heightens all theſe ill-placed ſentiments—forcing them upon your notice by an affectation of a deep ſenſe of re-

ligion, and moſt ſolemnly preaching the ſermon which the poet ſo improperly wrote.

All theſe, and many more, are faults which muſicians *really* commit; but a connoiſſeur will make them guilty of others, by way of compliment, which the compoſers never dreamt of. The introduction of the Coronation anthem, *Zadok the Prieſt*, is an arpeggio, which Handel probably took from his own performance at the harpſichord; but a great judge ſays, it is to expreſs the murmurs of the people aſſembled in the abbey. "*All we like ſheep are gone aſtray*" in the Meſſiah is conſidered as moſt excellently expreſſing the breaking out of ſheep from a field,——

But out of pity to the connoiſſeurs, virtuoſi, and the moſt reſpectable *Conoſcenti*, I will not increaſe my inſtances—God forbid I ſhould rob any man of his criticiſm!

Leſt I ſhould encroach upon *your* premiſes, I will quit ſuch dangerous ground, and leave you with more celerity than ceremony.

LETTER IX.

I Like every part of your poem except the parentheſis towards the concluſion. In the midſt of a rapid deſcription, or tender ſentiment; or any thing that commands the attention, or attaches the heart; what is more diſguſtful than to have the image cut in two, for the ſake of explaining a word, or removing an objection, which the reader may poſſibly make?

Milton and Shakſpeare frequently interrupt the moſt lively and

and ardent paſſages—take ſome inſtances as they occur.

Their arms away they threw, and to the hills
(For earth hath this variety from heav'n
Of pleaſure ſituate in hill or dale)
Light as the lightning's glimpſe they ran, they flew.

PAR. LOST, B. VI.

——————when on a day
(For time, though in eternity, apply'd
To motion, meaſures all things durable
By preſent, paſt, and future) on ſuch a day
As heaven's great year brings forth.

PAR. LOST, B. V.

——————— evening now approach'd
(For we have alſo our evening and our morn,
We ours for change delectable, not need)
Forthwith from dance to ſweet repaſt they turn
Deſirous; &c.

Upon the mention of *hills* in the firſt quotation, and of *day* and *evening* in the ſecond and laſt—he knew

knew that he had ſome objections to anſwer, and accordingly ſet about doing it for fear of the conſequences—I wiſh they had remained in their full force.

You have often read the Midſummer Night's Dream—do you recollect this paſſage?

Lyſ. *Hermia*, for ought that ever I could read,
Could ever hear by tale or hiſtory,
The courſe of true love never did run ſmooth;
But, either it was different in blood———

Her. O croſs! too high, to be enthrall'd to low!——

Lyſ. Or elſe miſgrafted in reſpect of years—

Her. O ſpite! too old, to be engag'd to young!

Lyſ. Or elſe it ſtood upon the choice of friends—

Her. O hell! to chuſe love by another's eye!

Lyſ.

Lyſ. Or if there were a ſympathy in choice—
War, death, or ſickneſs did lay ſiege to it.

Read it without Hermia's interruptions and it becomes one of the fineſt parts of the author; but it is miſerably mangled as it now ſtands.

You will remember that it is the improper uſe of the parentheſis I object to and not to the thing itſelf. "This figure of compoſition, ſays a late ingenious author, which is hardly ever uſed in common diſcourſe, is much employed by the beſt writers of antiquity, in order to give a caſt and colour to their ſtyle different from common idiom, and by Demoſthenes particularly; and not only by the orators, but the poets."

I would

I would recommend to your conſideration whether you had not better avoid giving any hint how the ſtory of your poem is to conclude? Anticipation frequently ſpoils a fine incident. When Æneas is reciting to Dido what paſſed at Troy, ſays he,

Arduus armatos mediis in mænibus aſtans
Fundit equus.

Æn. II.

The firſt mention of the Horſe's having armed men within, ſhould have been reſerved for this place. There is ſomething truly terrible and ſublime in Æneas's being waked by ſuch a variety of horrid ſounds, and ignorant of the cauſe; the reader alſo ſhould have been ignorant until Pantheus explained the

the myſtery. See the whole paſſage in Æn. II. beginning at the 298th verſe, and if poſſible, forget that this went before.

Delecta virum ſortiti corpora furtim
Includunt cæco lateri, &c.

One of the fineſt parts of Don Quixote is alſo ſpoiled by mentioning a circumſtance which ſhould have been delayed. The Knight and his 'Squire, at the cloſe of the day, hear the clank of chains, and dreadful blows, which would have puzzled the reader as much as it frightened them, had not the author unluckily ſaid " that the ſtrokes were in *time* and *meaſure*," which is telling us very plainly that it was a mill. The whole ſcene is highly pictoreſque and beautiful.

If

If these hints will be of any service to yow it will be a great pleasure to

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER X.

THE productions of genius require ſome ages to be brought to perfection. The liberal arts have their infancy, youth and manhood; and, to carry on the alluſion, continue ſometime in a ſtate of ſtrength, and then verge by degrees to a decline, which at laſt ends in a total extinction. The Engliſh language, poetry, and muſic, exhibit proofs of this obſervation, as far as they have as yet gone: with the two former I have at preſent nothing to do, but

ſhall

ſhall confine what I have to ſay on this ſubject to the latter.

What the muſic of the times preceding Harry the eighth was, I confeſs myſelf ignorant, nor indeed is the knowledge of it neceſſary: we may conclude that it was more barbarous than that of the ſixteenth century, as the times in which it was uſed were leſs enlightened. Some maſſes, mottets, and madrigals are what have reached us. The whole conſiſts in a ſucceſſion of chords without art or meaning, and perfectly deſtitute of Air. In Elizabeth's reign appeared ſome compoſers, Tallis, Bird, Morley, and Farrant, which improved the barren ſtyle of their predeceſſors: they had more choice

in

in their harmony, and made ſome little advances in melody. There were ſome pieces of inſtrumental muſic compoſed at this time which ſtill exiſt: particularly a book of leſſons, for the virginals, which was the Queen's.—Whether the compoſers thought that her ſacred Majeſty excelled in muſical abilities as much as in rank, or as ſhe wiſhed to do in beauty, I know not; but this is certain, that theſe pieces are ſo crowded with parts, and ſo aukwardly barbarous, as to render the performance of them impoſſible—ſo natural is it, even in the infancy of art, to miſtake difficulty for beauty.

I do not recollect any compoſer that really improved muſic for the

 firſt

firſt half of the ſeventeenth century, except Orlando Gibbons; of whom a ſervice for the church, and two or three anthems remain, the harmony of which is good, and the melody pleaſing. In the Gloria Patri of the Nunc Dimittis is the beſt canon, in my judgment, that was ever made. Gibbons was alſo a compoſer for the virginals, but in no reſpect better than his predeceſſors. I believe it was about this time that the ſpecies of canon called the catch, was produced. The intent of my making this ſhort recapitulation of the former ſtate of muſic is purely prefatory to what I have to ſay upon the ſubject of catches.

This

This odd ſpecies of compoſition, whenever invented, was brought to its perfection by Purcel. Real muſic was as yet in its childhood; but the reign of Charles the ſecond carried every kind of vulgar debauchery to its height: the proper æra for the birth of ſuch pieces as " when quartered, have ever three parts obſcenity, and one part muſic."

The definition of a catch is a piece for three or more voices, one of which leads, and the others follow in the ſame notes. It muſt be ſo contrived, that reſts (which are made for that purpoſe) in the muſic of one line, be filled up with a word or two from another line; theſe form a croſs-purpoſe or catch,

from whence the name. Now, this piece of wit is not judged perfect, if the reſult be not the rankeſt indecency.

Perhaps this definition may be objected to, and I may be told that there are catches perfectly harmleſs. It is true that ſome pieces are called catches that have nothing to offend, and others that may juſtly pretend to pleaſe; but they want what is abſolutely neceſſary for a catch—the break, and croſs-purpoſe.

It may alſo be ſaid that the reſult of the break, is not always indecency. I confeſs there are catches upon other ſubjects: drunkenneſs is a favourite one; which, though good, is not ſo *very* good

as

as the other: and there may poſſibly be found one or two upon other topicks which might be heard without diſguſt; but theſe are not ſufficient to contradict a general rule, or make me retract what I have advanced.

I will next examine their muſical merit.—And this as compoſitions muſt conſiſt either in their harmony, or melody; or their effect in performance.

The harmony of a catch is nothing more than the common reſult of filling up a chord.—There is not contrivance enough to make it eſteemed as a piece of ingenuity. "What! they are all canons!" So is every tune in the world, if you will ſet it in three or more

parts, and ſing thoſe parts in ſucceſſion as a catch—but a *real* canon is not ſo eaſily produced: it is one of thoſe difficult trifles which coſts an infinite deal of labour, and after all is worth nothing. I do not except the famous *Non nobis* of Bird, in which are ſome paſſages not to be endured. The excellence in the compoſition of a catch conſiſts in making the breaks, and filling them up properly. The melody is, for the moſt part, the unimproved vulgar drawl of the times of ignorance.

Let us next attend to the manner of performance. One voice leads, a ſecond follows, and a third, &c. ſucceeds, unaccompanied with any inſtrument to keep them in tune

tune together. The conſequence is, that the voices are always ſinking; but not equally, for the beſt ſinger will keep neareſt the pitch, and the others depart fartheſt from it. If the parts are doubled, which is ſometimes the caſe, all theſe defects are multiplied. To this, let there be added the imperfect ſcale of an uncultivated voice, the *departing* from the real ſound by way of humour, the noiſe of ſo many people ſtriving to outſing each other, the confuſion of ſpeaking different words at the ſame time, and all this heightened by the laughing and other accompaniments of the audience—it preſents ſuch a ſcene of ſavage folly, as would not diſgrace the Hottentots

indeed, but is not much to the credit of a company of civilized people.

As the catch in a manner owed its exiſtence to a drunken club, of which ſome muſicians were members; upon their dying, it languiſhed for years, and was ſcarce known except among choir-men, who now and then kept up the ſpirit of their forefathers. As the age grew more poliſhed, a better ſtyle of muſic appeared. Corelli gave a new turn to inſtrumental muſic, and was ſucceſsfully followed by Geminiani and Handel: the laſt excelled in vocal as well as inſtrumental muſic.

There have been refinements and confeſſed improvements upon all theſe great men ſince; and no doubt

doubt but at this time there are much better performers, and more elegant, tho' leſs ſolid compoſers. This is the united effect of the labours of the whole together; for there is no *one man* to be compared with either of the above-mentioned.

Now, if this were ſpeculation only, is it credible that taſte ſhould revert to barbariſm? Its natural death is, to be frittered away in falſe refinement; and yet, contrary to experience in every other inſtance, we have gone back a century, and catches flouriſh in the reign of George the third. There is a club compoſed of ſome of the firſt people in the kingdom, which meet profeſſedly to hear this ſpecies

of

of compoſition: they cultivate it and encourage it with premiums. To obtain which, many compoſers, who ought to be above ſuch nonſenſe, become candidates, and produce ſuch things

——— "one knows not what to call,
"Their generation's ſo equivocal."

Sometimes a piece makes its appearance that was lately found by accident, after a concealment of a hundred and fifty years. When it is approved, and declared too excellent for theſe degenerate days, the author ſmiles and owns it. I ſcarce ever ſaw one of theſe things that did not betray itſelf, within three bars, to be modern. It is as difficult to imitate ancient muſic, as ancient poetry; a few ſquare notes

notes are not ſufficient for the one, nor will two or three *whiloms* and *ekes* do for the other. And yet in this laſt inſtance, a few affected antiquated ſpellings have been thought, by one half of the world, ſufficient to weigh againſt modern phraſeology, modern manners, and even modern facts. Surely it requires no great diſcernment to diſcover that what has exiſted may be imitated, but nothing leſs than the gift of preſcience can dive into futurity. If it is *improbable* that an uneducated boy ſhould be able to produce what are called Rowley's Poems, it is *impoſſible* that Rowley could write in a ſtyle and allude to facts of after times. Forgive me this digreſſion, but indeed

indeed I have nearly finiſhed my ſubject and letter.

I profeſs that I never heard a catch ſung, but I felt more aſhamed than I can expreſs. I pretend to no more delicacy than that of the age I live in, which is very properly too refined to endure ſuch barbariſms—I was aſhamed for myſelf—for my company—and if a foreigner was preſent—for my country.

It has juſt occured to me that you like catches, and frequently help to ſing them—revenge yourſelf for the liberties I have taken, by compelling me to hear ſome of theſe pleaſant ditties, when perhaps I may be forced to ſing in my own defence.

Adieu.

P. S.

P. S. If you ſhould have a deſign to convert me—take me to the catch-club.—I confeſs, and honour, the ſuperior excellence of its performance, while I lament that ſo noble a ſubſcription ſhould be laviſhed for ſo poor a purpoſe as keeping alive muſical falſe-wit, when it might ſo powerfully ſupport and encourage the beſt ſtyle of compoſition; and rather advance our taſte by anticipating the improvements of the coming age, than force it back to times of barbariſm, from which it has coſt us ſuch pains to emerge.

LETTER

LETTER XI.

I Know that you are one of thoſe who conſider our language as paſt its meridian. Some think it was in its higheſt luſtre in the age of Sidney; others, in that of Addiſon. Perhaps, upon an impartial review of it, we ſhall find it more perfect now than ever.

In the authors before the reign of Elizabeth, there ſeems not the leaſt pretence to a ſimple, natural ſtyle. A man was held unfit to write, who could not expreſs his thoughts out of the common language;

language; ſo that it is poſſible, there was as much difficulty in underſtanding them at the time they lived, as now. If we are to judge of the Engliſh they ſpoke, by what they writ, we have no reaſon to complain of the fluctuation of our tongue. But it is very probable that converſation-language was much the ſame two hundred years ago as at preſent; there are proofs of this in private letters ſtill exiſting—I mean from ſuch people as had no ambition to be thought learned, or from ſuch as felt too much for affectation. The famous letter of Ann Boleyn to Henry the eighth, is of this laſt ſort, in which there is ſcarce an obſolete expreſſion.——I hope you make a

diſtinction

diſtinction between expreſſion and ſpelling—for as I once obſerved to you, it is but of late that our orthography has been fixed. In the State-tryals in Elizabeth and James's reign, we find near the ſame language we uſe at preſent, and this was taken immediately from the mouth. In thoſe paſſages where Shakſpeare's genius had not its full ſcope, may be obſerved his attempts to be thought learned, and refined; but where the ſubject was too impetuous to brook reſtraint, the language is as perfect as the idea. Upon the whole, tho' the colloquial Engliſh was much the ſame as at preſent, we may ſafely pronounce the ſtyle of the *authors* of this period to be barbarous.

The

The diſputes between Charles the firſt and the Parliament, were of great uſe in poliſhing the language; and tho' the King's papers are thought to be the moſt elegant, yet it is evident that both parties endeavoured at ſtrength for the good of their cauſe, and at perſpicuity for the ſake of being univerſally underſtood—and theſe two principles go near towards making a perfect ſtyle. Milton's proſe is in general very nervous, but it is not free from ſtiffneſs and affectation.

The other period is that of Addiſon. He was undoubtedly one of our ſmoothest and beſt writers: he had the ſkill of uniting eaſe, ſtrength, and correctneſs, and

did more towards improving the language than the united labours of fifty years before him. But yet there were ſome little remains of barbariſm ſtill left, which are evident enough in his contemporaries, and may be diſcovered even in him, by attending to the ſtyle and not to the matter. Will you believe that ſo elegant a writer has uſed *authenticalneſs* for *authenticity?*——You may find this horrid word in his Dialogues on Medals.

Political diſputes, tho' productive of ſo many bad effects, have lately done the ſame ſervice as they did formerly—they have improved our language. Thoſe in the Adminiſtration of Sir Robert Walpole, but more particularly theſe in our own

own times, have occaſioned ſome of the moſt perfect pieces of writing we have in our tongue. Though, from the nature of the ſubject, the pieces themſelves can ſcarce exiſt longer than the diſpute which gave them being; yet certainly their effect upon the language will be felt when the quarrel itſelf is no more, and every thing relating to it forgotten.

Tho' I have affirmed that our language is more perfect now than in any paſt period—yet there is ſtill much left in it to be corrected.—Indeed there are ſome defects in all languages, which have crept in by degrees, and are ſo ſanctified by cuſtom, that they can never be corrected. In Engliſh there is no

difference in writing, tho' there is in pronouncing, the preſent, and preterperfect tenſes of the verbs *read*, and *eat*, and ſome others. Some unſucceſsful attempts have been made to diſtinguiſh them by writing *redde* and *ate*. There are more words in Latin of contrary ſignifications which are written the ſame, than, I believe, in any other language. It is a *defect* if the pronunciation of different words be alike, and a great fault if ſuch pronunciation be the conſequence of a refinement. We now pronounce *fore* and *four*, the ſame; which ſometimes makes an odd confuſion. " I will come to you at three, I can't come *before*"—and " I will come to you at three, I can't

can't come *by four*"——are pronounced juſt the ſame way. This we get by affectedly dropping the *u*. In French *au deſſous* and *au deſſus* are too much alike for contrary ſignifications. Nature dictates a difference of ſound for different meanings: the adverbs of negation and aſſent bear no reſemblance to each other in any language; and almoſt all languages agree in ſome ſuch ſound as *no* for denial.

The London dialect is the cauſe of many improprieties, which, if they were only uſed in converſation, would not much ſignify; but as they have begun to make part of our written language, they deſerve ſome animadverſion. To mention

a few. The cuſtom among the common people of adding an *s* to many words, has, I believe, occaſioned its being fixed to ſome, by writers of rank, who on account of their reſidence in London did not perceive the impropriety. They ſpeak, and write, *chickens—coals ——acquaintances—aſſiſtances*, &c. *Chicken* is itſelf the plural of *chick*, as *oxen* is of *ox*, *kine (cowen)* is of *cow*, and many others. *Coal*, *acquaintance*, being aggregate nouns, admit of no plural termination, nor does *aſſiſtance*. If I were to ſay a bag of *ſhots*, or *ſands*, the impropriety would be inſtantly perceived; and yet one is full as good Engliſh as the other. A certain author of great credit, who has taken

taken a ſtrict, nay, a verbal review of the Engliſh language, uſes them as often as they occur.

As the Londoners ſpeak, ſo they alſo write *learn* for *teach*, this is a very old miſtake, and occurs frequently in the pſalms; *do* for *does* (and the contrary), *ſet* for *ſit*, *ſee* for *ſaw*, *tin* for *latten* (which are two different things as well as words), *ſulky* for *ſullen*, &c. &c. *'Change* and *'ſample* have been long admitted denizens.——Even in a dictionary you may find *million* explained to be a fruit well known —as perhaps in a future edition we ſhall be told that *fly* ſignifies a *coach*, and *dilly* a *chaiſe*.

The London *phraſeology* has alſo been too hard for Engliſh. *I got me up—he ſets him down—I got no*

ſleep—I ſlept none—ſuch a thing is *a* doing—*a* going—*a* coming—*live* lobſters—*live* cattle—I will call *of* you—do not tell *on* it. All theſe are writ without ſcruple. Our modern comedies, and the London news-papers, abound ſo much in this language, that they are ſcarce intelligible to one who has never been in the capital. Nay in books for the uſe of ſchools, the London dialect is ſo predominant, that many of the ſentences are not to be underſtood by a country boy, and impoſſible to be rendered into Latin even by thoſe who do underſtand them. "I will go and fetch a walk in the Green Park"—"I will go get me my dinner," and ſuch jargon is perpetually occurring.

Engliſh

Engliſh has alſo been corrupted by London *emphaſis* and *accent*—I will not tire you by quoting examples, of which a long liſt might be made, to prove the great propenſity of the common people to thoſe defects; and would be a farther confirmation of what I juſt now advanced, that men of learning really commit improprieties becauſe their ear is familiarized to them. The debates in Parliament, tho' certainly the beſt ſpecimens of eloquence that the world can produce, have frequently given birth to barbariſms which are received into our language, and remain in it. If an eminent ſpeaker, in the hurry of declamation, coins a word, or uſes a bad

phraſe,

phraſe, it is taken up by others upon his authority. There is ſcarce a ſeſſion but what produces ſomething of this ſort, which if it gets into the public papers, it is ſpread over the kingdom, and ſoon becomes fixed too firm to be ever removed.

I have yet ſomething to add on this ſubject—but I muſt caution you from imagining that becauſe I find out the faults of others, I pretend to perfection myſelf. Hogarth ſays very properly in his Analyſis of Beauty, "do not look for good drawing in thoſe examples which I bring of grace and beauty—they are purpoſely neglected—attend to the precept."

LETTER

LETTER XII.

I Sometimes provoke you by ſporting with what you deem ſacred matters. Homer I know is one of your divinities—may I venture to tell you that I never could find that ſcale of heroes in the Iliad which critics admire as ſuch a beauty?

Hector is ſuppoſed in valour ſuperior to all but Achilles—upon what authority? Ajax certainly beat him in the ſingle combat between them; and there are ſome inſtances,

inſtances, tho' I cannot recollect the paſſages, of his inferiority to others of the Greeks.

It is ſurely a blindneſs worſe than Homerican, not to ſee many inconſiſtencies in the Iliad, and it is ridiculous to attempt to make beauties of them. From many which might eaſily be pointed out, take one or two as they occur to my memory. After deſcribing Mars as the moſt terrible of beings, and to whom whole armies are as nothing; what *poetical* belief is ſtrong enough to ſuppoſe he could be made to retire by Diomed? If Minerva's ſhield is ſo vaſt (the ſhell of a Kraken, I ſuppoſe), can one help wondering why ſhe does not uſe it as the King of Laputa does

does his iſland, when his ſubjects on Terra-Firma rebel? It is not the hyperbole that offends, but the inconſiſtency. The poet had a right to form, and to endue his gods with what properties he pleaſed—he made them all-powerful; of courſe, reſiſtance from mere mortals is ridiculous and impoſſible.

Milton has ſhewn much addreſs in preventing an inconſiſtency of this ſort, which ſeemed unavoidable. When Gabriel meets Satan in Paradiſe, every event and reply promiſes an immediate combat; which "horrid fray" is prevented by what moſt readers would think an ingenious improvement on the golden ſcales of Homer and Virgil.

Voltaire

Voltaire quarrels with the whole incident, and calls the breaking off of the fight a diſappointment, and the manner by which it is done, puerile. But ſurely it is more conſiſtent to hinder the encounter, than to bring on a contention which muſt either have deſtroyed the late creation, or leſſened our idea of the might of the combatants.—Nay, I will go farther—if it had been conſiſtent with the character of the Angels to have fought, and the world to have remained unhurt; it is better to prevent the combat, as it would have anticipated the war of the Angels in the ſixth book, where there is alſo a ſingle combat, which has a greater effect by being kept

diſtinct

diſtinct from other incidents of the ſame kind. So that our poet deſerves praiſe rather than cenſure for the conduct of this incident; more eſpecially as we find his great predeceſſor ſo frequently loſes conſiſtence of character, which Milton has in this inſtance, and, indeed, many others, ſo dexterouſly preſerved.

LETTER XIII.

YOU have not done me juſtice —read the memoirs I ſent you *properly* before they are condemned: —what is any book if it be not read in that manner by which it may beſt be underſtood? A novel, whoſe merit lies chiefly in the ſtory, ſhould be quickly paſſed through; for the cloſer you can bring the ſeveral circumſtances together, the better. If its merit conſiſts in character and ſentiment, it ſhould be read much ſlower; for the leaſt obvious parts of a character are frequently

frequently the moſt beautiful, and the propriety of a ſentiment may eaſily eſcape in a haſty peruſal. Detached thoughts ought to be dwelt on longer than any other manner of writing; for different ſubjects following cloſe, do rather confound than inſtruct; but if we allow ourſelves time to reflect, we may underſtand the author and perhaps improve ourſelves. Each thought ſhould be conſidered as a text, upon which we ought to make a commentary.

Bayle's manner of writing by text and note is generally decried, but without reaſon. When there is a neceſſity of proving the aſſertion by quotation, which was his caſe, no other way can be taken equally perſpicuous. The authori-

ties muſt be produced ſomewhere —they cannot be in the text, and if they are put at the end of the book, which is the modern faſhion, how much more troubleſome are they for referring to, than by being at the bottom of the page? The truth is, this is another inſtance of ignorance in the method of reading. Bayle, Harris, and other writers of this claſs, ſhould have the text read firſt, which is quickly diſpatched; then, begin again and take in the notes. By theſe means you preſerve a connection, and judge of the proofs of what is aſſerted.

I might in other reſpects complain of your treating me rather unfairly; indeed, none judge leſs favourably of an author than his intimate friends——their perſonal knowledge

knowledge of him as a man, deſtroys a hundred delusions to his advantage as an author.—"Who is a hero to his Valet de Chambre?" ſaid the great Condé, and he might have added, "or to his friends?" Beſides the obvious reaſon for this, it is moſt likely that an author has, in his common converſation, made his friends acquainted with his ſentiments long before they are communicated to the public. The conſequence is, that to *them* his work is not new; and it is poſſible that they may take to themſelves part of his merit; for I have known many inſtances, where a perſon has been told ſomething by way of information, which he himſelf told to the informer.

Permit me to add, tho' without any application to yourſelf, that an author's intimate acquaintance frequently do him more harm than avowed enemies. They ſhew ſo many apprehenſions on his account —they ſo much dread the cenſure he may incur, and the enemies he may create by his new opinions, &c.

All this betrays a want of confidence, and is very naturally ſet down to their knowing ſomething of the author and his works the world is not acquainted with.

It is certain, that the leſs perſonal knowledge we have of an author, the greater is our eſteem for his productions; of courſe, we commend thoſe the moſt, of whom we know the leaſt.

LETTER XIV.

* * * * * *

WE are got into a cuſtom of mentioning Shakſpeare and Jonſon together, and many think them of equal merit, tho' in different ways. In my opinion, Jonſon is one of the dulleſt writers I ever read; and his plays, with ſome few exceptions, the moſt unentertaining I ever ſaw. He has ſome ſhining paſſages now and then, but not enough to make up for his deficiencies. Shakſpeare, on the contrary, abundantly recompenſes for

being ſometimes low and trifling. One of his commentators much admires his great art in the conſtruction of his verſes—I dare ſay they are very perfect; but it is as much out of my power to think upon the art of verſe-making when I am reading this divine poet, as it is to conſider of the beſt way of making fiddle-ſtrings at a concert. I am not maſter of myſelf ſufficiently to do any thing that requires deliberation: I am taken up like a leaf in a whirlwind, and dropped at Thebes or Athens, as the poet pleaſes!

I have ſeldom any pleaſure from the repreſentation of Shakſpeare's plays, unleſs it be from ſome ſcenes of converſation merely, without paſſion.

paſſion. The ſpeeches which have any thing violent in the expreſſion, are generally ſo over-acted as to ceaſe to be the "mirror of nature"—but this was always the caſe—"Oh! it offends me to the ſoul, to ſee a robuſtious perriwig-pated fellow tear a paſſion to tatters:"—'tho' this is a "lamentable thing," yet it appears to be without remedy. An actor, in a large theatre, is like a picture hung at a diſtance, if the touches are delicate, they eſcape the ſight: both muſt be extravagant to be ſeen at all, and hence the cuſtom of the ancients to make uſe of the Perſona and Buſkin. Acting has a very different effect in the ſtage-box from what it has in the back of

the gallery. In the one, every thing appears rough and rude, like a picture of Spagnolet's near the eye; in the other it is with difficulty that the play can be made out. Perhaps, the beſt place is the front of the firſt gallery; as being ſufficiently removed to ſoften theſe hardneſſes, yet near enough to ſee and hear with advantage. But there is no place can alter the impropriety of rant and turgid declamation, which the performer naturally runs into by endeavouring to be ſtrong enough to be heard—ſo that, as I obſerved, the evil ſeems to be incurable.

As the performance of a play is beyond nature, ſo is the writing of it. The plot muſt partake of the marvellous

marvellous, the characters muſt be in ſituations too violent for common life, and ſpeak a language unheard (but on the ſtage) in mirth or diſtreſs. Our late comedies indeed are exceptions to this rule, for they are ſome degrees *below* nature. The modern tragedies have loſt all ſight of nature, ſo that it is difficult to ſay whether they are above or below it.

Thoſe who think that Shakſpeare's perſonages are natural, are deceived. If they were ſo, they would not be ſufficiently marked for ſtage-effect. A ſtrong proof of this is in the portrait of Lear, who is "four-ſcore and upward." Were the character natural, Lear would be beſt acted by an

an old man: but every one muſt inſtantly perceive, that it requires the ſtrength as well as the abilities of the vigour of life to perform it.

I believe it will be found that all characters which intereſt us are over-charged, and not real nature, but what the dramatic poets have agreed to conſider as ſuch. If we hit this point, our piece is perfect; if we come ſhort, it is flat; if we exceed, it is bombaſt.

LETTER

LETTER XV.

AN acquaintance of ours has correſponded with a writing-maſter many years, not from any regard to the man, but for the pleaſure he takes in ſeeing fine writing. He preſerves his letters carefully, and though he *reads* them to none, (perhaps they are ſtill unread by himſelf) he *ſhews* them to all who can reliſh the excellence of a flouriſh "long drawn out."——Our friend's taſte may be ridiculed by thoſe who "hold it a baſeneſs to write fair," but yet it is certain, that

that the true form of letters, in writing, is underſtood no where but in England. I never ſaw a ſpecimen of a correct hand either written or engraved, from any other country, that was upon a right principle. Perhaps it may be objected, that every nation, prejudiced in favour of their own particular manner, will ſay the ſame thing. Let us examine this.

Modern writing-hand had its riſe from an endeavour to form the true letters as they are printed, with expedition. The firſt variation from the original, muſt be an oblique inſtead of a perpendicular ſituation, this naturally ariſes from the poſition of the hand—the next, a joining of the letters; theſe two

neceſſarily

neceſſarily produce a third, an alteration of the form. So that writing-hand differs from printing in this, that the former is an arrangement of *connected* characters, the latter of *diſtinct* ones. The ſlit in the pen makes the down-ſtrokes full, and the up-ſtrokes ſlight, ſo that the body of the letter is ſtrong, and the joinings weak, as they ſhould be. It is moſt natural and eaſy alſo to hold the pen always in the ſame poſition; by which means, the full and hair-ſtrokes are always in their right places. So far, ſeems the neceſſary conſequence of endeavouring to make the letters expeditiouſly with a pen. This being granted, the ornamental part comes

next to be conſidered. For this, it is requiſite that the letters ſhould be of the ſame ſize and diſtance, that their leaning ſhould be in the ſame direction, that the joining be as much as poſſible uniform; and, laſtly, that the ſuperadded ornament of flouriſhing, ſhould be continued in the ſame poſition of the pen in which it was firſt begun, (generally the reverſe of the uſual way of holding it), and that the forms be diſtinct, flowing, and graceful.

Theſe appear to me to be the true principles of writing. Examine the Italian and French hands by theſe rules, (ſome of the beſt ſpecimens are the titles of prints, &c.) and the hand which they uſe will

will be found to be unconnected, full of unmeaning twifts and curlings generally produced by altering the poſition of the pen, and upon the whole awkward, ſtiff, and ungraceful.

As they *now* write, we *did*, about ſeventy or eighty years ſince; ſo that our preſent beautiful hand is a new one, and by its being uſed no where but in England, I muſt conclude it to be an Engliſh invention.

Believe me, in my beſt writing, and with my beſt wiſhes, ever

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XVI.

I Have often reflected with great grief, that there is ſcarce any remarkable natural object in the ſublime ſtyle, of which we have a drawing to be depended on. The cataract of Niagara.—The peak of Teneriffe, we know nothing of, but that the one is the greateſt water-fall, and the other the higheſt ſingle mountain in the world. It is true, Condamine ſays, that the Andes far ſurpaſs the peak of Teneriffe; more than a third—but, it ſhould be conſidered, that the valley

valley of Quito is 1600 fathoms above the ſea, and that it is from the foot of the mountain that the eye judges of its height. The peak of Teneriffe riſes at once, and has, comparatively, but a ſmall baſe—ſo that, in appearance, it is the higheſt of mountains. Teneriffe has been aſcended by many, but deſcribed by none, for I cannot call theſe accounts deſcriptions, which would ſuit any other high mountain as well. Indeed, people generally viſit ſuch objects from other motives than a wiſh to ſatisfy curioſity, or encreaſe knowledge. A party aſcended this mountain about a hundred years ago—one of the company deſcribing their journey, ſays—" being at *la Stancha*,

while the reſt were ſpending their time *in cards*, &c. I made it my buſineſs to admire the ſtrangeneſs and vaſtneſs of that great body," &c. The cataract of Niagara is moſt excellently *deſcribed* by Mr. Kalm; but all deſcriptions of viſible objects come ſo ſhort of a repreſentation, and are neceſſarily ſo imperfect, that if ten different painters were to read Mr. Kalm's account of this amazing fall, and to draw it from his deſcription, we ſhould have as many different draughts as painters. There muſt be ſome amazing ſcenes in Norway by Pontoppidan's deſcriptions, and in the Alps by Schuchtzer's: theſe writers, and many travellers give views of what they apprehend to

be

be curious; but draughts made without genius, or by genius without practice, can never give ſuch reſemblance as to convey a proper idea of objects. The view of Lombardy from the Alps—the Bay of Naples——the appearance of Genoa from the ſea, &c. &c. are much talked of, but have never been drawn; or if drawn, not publiſhed. From this general cenſure I ſhould except a View of Veſuvius by a pupil of Vernet's, and two Views of the Giant's Cauſeway in Ireland, but above all, Gaſpar Pouſſin's drawings from Tivoli, and Pars's View of the Glaciers ſo admirably etched and engraved by Woollet. All theſe have ſomething ſo characteriſtic, that we may

be ſure that they give a proper idea of the ſcenes from whence they were taken. Of the many thouſands that are conſtantly going to the Eaſt-Indies, not one has publiſhed a drawing of the Cape of Good Hope, nor of Adam's Peak in Ceylon, nor fifty other remarkable objects which are ſeen in that voyage.—What I mean by a drawing is a *picturesque* view, not a mere outline for the uſe of navigators, nor the unmeaning marks of a pencil directed by ignorance. I greatly ſuſpect the ſo much commended draughts in Anſon's voyage to be nothing but outlines filled up at random; and more than ſuſpect, that many deſigns in ſome late publications of this ſort, are mere inventions at home.

I have

I have been led into this ſubject by the two admirable deſcriptions of Ætna by Sir W. Hamilton and Brydone—as much as *words* can realize objects, they *are* realized.—But yet, a dozen different views taken by real artiſts, would have done more in an inſtant, than any effect within the power of deſcription.

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LETTER XVII.

IS there not ſomething very fanciful in the analogy which ſome people have diſcovered between the arts? I do not deny the *commune quoddam vinculum*, but would keep the principle within its proper bounds. Poetry and painting, I believe, are only allied to muſic and to each other; but muſic, beſides having the above-named ladies for ſiſters, has alſo aſtronomy and geometry for brothers, and grammar—for a couſin, at leaſt. I am ſure I have left out many of the family, though,

though, if I could enumerate what ſeems at preſent the whole, it is odds, but there would be a new relation diſcovered ſoon by an adept in this buſineſs.—Why ſhould not I find out one or two?—I will try.

Let me ſee—what is there near me? Oh! a ſtandiſh—muſic then ſhall be like my ſtandiſh. Any thing elſe?—Yes—like the grate—or like that ſhirt now hanging by the fire, which makes ſo excellent a ſcreen.

"How prove you this in your great wiſdom?"

Marry! thus—muſic bears great analogy to my ſtandiſh; becauſe there is one bottle for the ink, another for the ſand, and the third for wafers—theſe are evidently the uniſon, third, and fifth, which make a

compleat chord; and thoſe three a compleat ſtandiſh.—The pen is ſo evidently the plectrum, that it is inſulting you to mention it.

"But why like the grate?"

Bleſs me! did you never ſee a teſtudo,—a lyre? The bars are the ſtrings, the back is the belly—need I enlarge? What is the fire but the vis muſica?—and here, the poker is the plectrum.

"But how can it poſſibly be like the ſhirt?"

Pho! any thing in analogy is poſſible.—Like my ſhirt?—Why, the body is the baſs, the ſleeves are two trebles—the ruffles are ſhakes and flouriſhes—the three buttons of the collar are evidently the common chord. But, a truce with ſuch

ſuch nonſenſe.—There are ſcarce any two things in the world but may be *made* to reſemble each other. Permit me to ſhew the ſlightneſs of another received opinion concerning muſic.

" What paſſion cannot muſic raiſe or quell?" ſays Dryden, or Pope, I forget which: and the ſame thought is ſo often expreſſed by other poets, and ſo generally adopted by all authors upon this ſubject, that it would be a bold attempt to contradict it, were there not an immediate appeal to general feeling, which I hope is ſuperior to all authority. Thus ſupported then, I aſk in my turn—" What paſſion *can* muſic raiſe or quell?" Who ever felt himſelf affected, otherwiſe

otherwiſe than with pleaſure, at thoſe ſtrains which are ſuppoſed to inſpire grief—rage—joy—or pity? and this, in a degree, equal to the goodneſs of the compoſition and performance. The effect of muſic, in this inſtance, is juſt the ſame as of poetry. We attend—are pleaſed—delighted—tranſported—and when the heart can bear no more, "glow, tremble, and weep." All theſe are but different degrees of pure *pleaſure*. When a poet or muſician has produced this laſt effect, he has attained the utmoſt in the power of poetry or muſic. Tears being a general expreſſion of grief, pain, and pity; and muſic, when in its perfection, producing them, has occaſioned the miſtake, of its raiſing the

the paſſions of grief, &c. But tears, in fact, are nothing but the mechanical effect of every ſtrong affection of the heart, and produced by all the paſſions; even joy and rage. It is this effect, and the pleaſurable ſenſation together, which Oſſian (whether ancient or modern I care not) calls "the joy of grief."——It is this effect, when produced by ſome grand image, which Dr. Blair, his critic, ſtyles the "ſublime pathetic."

I have choſen to illuſtrate theſe obſervations from poetry rather than from muſic, becauſe it is more generally underſtood, and eaſier to quote—but the principle is equal in both the arts.

Adieu.

LETTER

LETTER XVIII.

YOUR pictures came ſafe—my opinion of them you will in part know from the following obſervations, which, though made on another occaſion, are equally applicable to this.

There is in landſcape-painting, and novel-writing, a fault committed by ſome of the beſt artiſts and authors, which is as yet unnamed, becauſe perhaps unnoticed; permit me to call it a *bad aſſociation.*

In

In a landſcape, it is not ſufficient that all the objects are ſuch as may well be found together.——In a ſtory, it is not enough that the incidents are ſuch as may well happen—it is neceſſary in both, that all the circumſtances ſhould be of the *ſame family*.

Suppoſe a landſcape had for its ſubject one of Gaſpar Pouſſin's Views of Tivoli—now, tho' there is nothing more natural than to find mills by running water, yet a mill is not an object that can poſſibly agree with the other parts of the picture. Suppoſe in a landſcape of Ruyſdale there were introduced the ruins of a temple; though a temple may be properly placed in a wood near water, yet it does not

ſuit

ſuit the ruſtic ſimplicity of the pictures of this artiſt.——Give the mill to Ruyſdale and the temple to Gaſpar—all will be right. Theſe two painters were the moſt perfect in their different ſtyles that ever exiſted. Both formed themſelves upon the ſtudy of nature, both were correct, both excellent; and yet ſo totally different from each other, that there are ſcarce any parts of the pictures of the one, that will bear being introduced into thoſe of the other. Claude's magnificent ideas frequently betrayed him into *a bad aſſociation*.—Large grand maſſes of trees agree but ill with ſea and ſhips, unleſs they are removed to a diſtance.——An Engliſh painter, who formed himſelf

ſelf upon the ſtudy of Gaſpar, took his trees, rocks, and other circumſtances from that maſter; but his buildings from the Gardiner's huts at Newington.

A ſtory which proceeds upon a regular circumſcribed plan, chiefly conſiſting of dialogue and ſentiment, where the ſcene is laid in London, and the characters ſuch as are natural to the place; has *a bad aſſociation* if the author goes to Africa in queſt of adventures. On the other hand, a novel which ſets out upon the principle of variety, and where a frequent change of place is neceſſary to the execution of the deſign; has *a bad aſſociation* if the author in any part of it quits

adventure

adventure for ſentiment or ſatire. And yet, this has been done by Fielding and Smollet, the two beſt novel-writers of the age.

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END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.